A

SERMON.

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Diſcretion, in matters pertaining to *Religion*, recommended

IN A

SERMON

PREACHED AT THE

Primary VISITATION

OF THE

HON. AND RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD

BROWNLOW, Lord Biſhop of WINCHESTER;

Holden at GILDFORD

MAY 9, 1788.

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To

The Honorable and Right Reverend Father in God

BROWNLOW Lord Biſhop of WINCHESTER

This Sermon,

Publiſhed at his Lordſhip's Requeſt,

is humbly inſcribed by

His Lordſhip's

moſt dutiful

and obedient Servant

The Author.

May 9, 1788.

1 Cor. x. 23.

All things are *lawful* for me, but all things are not *expedient*.

THE Church of CORINTH, at the time this Epiſtle was written, conſiſted of two different ſorts of Converts, *viz.* ſuch as had been drawn off from the idol-worſhip of the *Gentiles*, and ſuch as had been gained over from the *Jewiſh* religion, to *Chriſtianity*. Each of theſe retained too much of the prejudices and practices they had formerly been accuſtomed to; and each of theſe had their leaders and teachers, who were forward enough to take advantage of their prejudices. Hence they became divided into ſects and factions; while the former, bred up in the principles of *Gentile Philoſophy*, and the latter in an attachment to the *traditions* of their *Elders*, blended their reſpective Opinions with the doctrines of their *new* Religion, to the great prejudice of that Religion, and the diſtraction of their own minds.

Mean time, the more ſober and well-diſpoſed of each ſort wrote to the Apoſtle on the ſubject of ſome doubts

they had been made to entertain, and by his determination of which they ſeemed fully reſolved to abide. One of theſe ſeems to have been, how far it was allowable, in thoſe who had embraced *Chriſtianity*, to partake of Meats that had been offered in ſacrifice to *Idols**. And, as the Apoſtle's anſwer, and the argument by which it is ſupported, apply, with ſingular force and propriety in many inſtances that occur in the practice of ſucceeding times, even to the preſent, I ſhall make the conſideration of theſe the ſubject of the following Diſcourſe.

It appears then, from the Apoſtle's method of reaſoning with them, that the Converts, who appealed to him on the preſent occaſion, were perſons who valued themſelves not a little upon the advances they had made in the attainment of religious *knowledge*, and upon the *liberty* with which, in conſequence of their new profeſſion, "CHRIST had made them free;"—the former of which they conſidered as abundantly juſtifying them in all points to which it extended, in the fulleſt exerciſe of the latter; which, again,

* It may be proper, and ſerve alſo to illuſtrate what is ſaid in the 25th and 27th verſes of this Chapter, concerning Meats offered unto Idols being ſerved up at *private Tables*, and ſet to *ſale* in the *ſhambles*, to obſerve that, when the Heathens did ſacrifice to their falſe Gods, it was cuſtomary, after the Beaſt had been conſecrated and ſlain, to burn certain parts of it upon the Altar, and feaſt upon it jointly in the temple of the Idol, and to diſpoſe of the reſt among thoſe who attended upon the Solemnity, or in the *public Markets* to be *ſold* for common uſe.

they

they conſidered as of no uſe or value if, under ſuch circumſtances of juſtification, they might not exerciſe it as they pleaſed.—Thus, when "Meats offered unto Idols," and the lawfulneſs of eating them, became the ſubject of diſcuſſion, they argued, from the perfect *knowledge* they had of the *inſignificancy* of an Idol, that no Meats offered in ſacrifice to them could receive any *change* in their nature from ſuch act of conſecration,—that they were of no more *ſanctity* therefore *after* ſuch act of conſecration than *before*—and, conſequently, being in no reſpect *different* from Meats *not* offered unto Idols, might be partaken of in the ſame manner, and with as little ſcruple, as *they* were.

In anſwer to this, the Apoſtle gives them to underſtand that, though he allowed the *principles* they reaſoned upon to be ſound and good, yet he by no means admitted their *reaſoning* upon them to be concluſive in *all* caſes, and without *exception*. He cautions them to remember that, in every undertaking, there are two things to be conſidered as neceſſary to juſtify the perſuit of it. The firſt is, the *lawfulneſs* of it; becauſe, if a thing is *unlawful* in itſelf, it is at no rate to be perſued: And the next is the *propriety* or *expediency* of it; becauſe, however *lawful* a thing may be *in itſelf*, it may yet, on various conſiderations, be highly *improper* to be brought forward into *practice*.—The *lawfulneſs* of any thing is to be determined by it's *conformity* with the

Rule that is given us to walk by, which, in matters of *religious* concern, is the *reveled* Will of God; The *expediency* of it, by circumſtances of *time*, *place*, *character*, and *ſituation*: Whence it will follow that, what is perfectly *conſonant* to our *rule* of conduct, and therefore ſtrictly *lawful*, when *nothing elſe* is taken into the account, may yet be *unſeaſonable* in point of *time*, *unbecoming* the *character* we are inveſted with, or *unſuitable* to the *ſituation* of our ſelves and things about us; and, in either of theſe caſes, however *lawful*, by no means *expedient*.

The general doctrine of the Apoſtle then, in the paſſage before us, is plainly this; that we cannot argue, from the *mere lawfulneſs* of any thing, that it is therefore *allowable* in *practice*: for that many things, which we are not abſolutely *forbidden* to do, it may yet, from *circumſtances*, be very *improper* to do. Thus, with reſpect to "Meats offered unto *idols*," as far as your *own* Conſcience *only* (ſays the Apoſtle) is concerned, who "know that an Idol is *nothing*, "and that things *offered* unto Idols are nothing," you may, even knowing them to be ſuch, *lawfully* partake of them. Be not therefore ſcrupulous whether what you meet with in the *markets* hath been offered unto idols, or not: On the contrary, "*whatſoever* is ſold in the *ſhambles*," ſays he, "that *eat*, aſking no queſtions for *Conſcience*' ſake." In like manner, "if any of them that believe not (any of your

"*heathen*

" *heathen* neighbors) bid you to a feaſt, and ye be diſpoſed " to go;" here again, make no enquiry, for *Conſcience* ſake, whether any thing you meet with *there* hath been conſecrated to idols, or not; but, " *whatſoever* is ſet before you, " *eat.*" If indeed the perſon who invited you gives you to underſtand that ſuch or ſuch part of the Entertainment *hath* been offered to an idol; in this caſe, your *own* Conſcience *only* is not concerned, but that alſo of *others*, *viz.* of the perſon who invited you, and of ſuch other new Converts as may happen to be preſent; the former of which may, by your example, be confirmed in his *Idolatry*, while the latter may be induced to think lightly of *that* Religion to which they have lately been converted, when they ſee you give ſo eaſily into practices which, in their opinion, may be conſidered as countenancing ſuch Idolatry. Here it is then that the *diſcretion*, which I have been recommending in the uſe of your *Chriſtian Liberty*, ought to take place. For, though I may allow that the thing *it ſelf* might have no evil in it, if it were not for *prejudicing* and *offending* others; yet, " if any man ſee you that have *knowledge* ſit " at meat in the Idol's Temple" (which is plainly countenancing idolatry) or, which is nearly the ſame thing, partaking at your *Neighbor's table*, of what you are openly told hath been offered unto idols, whereby " the Conſcience " of him that is *weak* may be emboldened to eat thoſe " things which are offered unto Idols," *as* things offered unto

" Idols,

Idols, you are then bound in conſcience to forbear. Otherwiſe, " through your *knowledge*," or rather, your imprudent *uſe* of your knowledge, " the *weak* brother may *periſh*," by being encouraged to do an act which in him is *ſinful:* In which caſe, " you ſin againſt ſuch of the brethren, by " wounding their weak Conſcience;" and, ſo doing, " ſin " alſo againſt CHRIST," and the *principles* of his Religion.

With this *general* argument of the Apoſtle's for abſtaining from things *lawful*, where the doing them would give *offence*, and be therefore *inexpedient*, are interwoven many juſt and intereſting reflections on the nature of *Chriſtian liberty*, and the *diſcretion* with which it ought always be exerciſed.—The " *Knowledge*," ſays he, and the ſkill to diſtinguiſh, in religious matters, ſo much better than others, which ſome perſons pretend to, while they take no care what *offence* they give to their fellow-Chriſtians by their manner of *applying* it, only " puffeth up;" only ſerves to ſhow their pride and vanity. It is that " *Charity*" alone, which teacheth us to have regard to their *weakneſſes*, that " *edifieth*"—that buildeth up and eſtabliſheth the Chriſtian character: And therefore, " if any man thinketh " that he knoweth any thing," i. e. is perſuaded that he underſtandeth his own Chriſtian principles ever ſo perfectly, yet, in particular caſes, practiſes upon them without any regard to the good or hurt it may do to *others*; he " knoweth

" nothing

" nothing yet as he *ought* to know" of the genius and temper even of the Religion he profeſſeth; which doth not, *intentionally*, " miniſter Queſtions" for the exerciſe of our talent at diſcuſſion; and the diſcuſſion of which moſt notoriouſly ſerves only to " gender ſtrifes;" but whoſe view is that of " inſtructing in *meekneſs*" the ignorant, and " ſuch as " oppoſe themſelves," and to bring them, by *candor*, and *forbearance*, and a *condeſcenſion* to their weakneſſes, " to the " acknowlegement of the truth."—Again; " *Meat* com- " mendeth us not to God;" for, neither if we *eat*, are we " the *better*, nor, if we *eat not*, are we the *worſe*; that is, the liberty, which our Religion allows us, does not, if we *uſe* it, recommend us as *better* Men; neither, if we uſe it *not*, can we be thought the *worſe* of. " Take heed therefore " leſt, by any means," particularly by *unſeaſonably aſſerting* it, " this liberty of yours become a *ſtumbling-block* to them " that are *weak*." In a word, be it never ſo *lawful*, take not even *innocent* liberties, in the moſt *indifferent* matters, where ye ſee they are likely to be an occaſion of drawing *more ignorant* people into any thing *prejudicial* to *Religion*. " Give " none offence; neither to the *Jews*, nor to the *Gentiles*, " nor to the *Church* of God," of which ye are members. Do nothing that may be a means of perverting or diſcouraging any member of the Church from his Chriſtian profeſſion: But, " whether ye *eat* or *drink*, or whatever ye " do, do all to the glory of God"—uſe your liberty, as

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in the matter we have been ſpeaking of, ſo in all other matters, in ſuch a manner as to ſhew that ye have the common intereſt and credit of your *Chriſtian* profeſſion always and moſt at heart.

This reaſoning of the Apoſtle upon the *uſe* and *abuſe* of *Chriſtian Liberty* in the caſe *then* under conſideration, applies, as I have already intimated, with ſingular force and propriety, to many inſtances of practice in *our own* times; where the *liberty*, which is very juſtly underſtood to be the *common right* of CHRISTIANS, is, for want of a due *diſcretion* in the exerciſe of it, and a due regard to the *influence* ſuch exerciſe of it may have upon the *opinions* and *conduct* of *others*, frequently miſ-uſed, ſo as to "become a *ſtumbling-*"*block* to them that are *weak*," by unſettling their minds, not only with reſpect to the *particular matter* on which it may be exerciſed on any *particular occaſion*, but, it may be alſo, with reſpect to their religious principles and obligations in *other* inſtances.

I. Thus, the obſervance of the LORD'*s Day*, both as a day of *public worſhip*, and a day of *reſt* from the ordinary labours of the week, being conſidered, by every ſober and well-informed Chriſtian, as a religious duty; the *general neglect* of it's *ſtated ſervices*, or the employment of it to *worldly* purpoſes, where no circumſtance of *neceſſity* occurs to juſtify

juſtify our doing ſo, is deſervedly looked upon as a plain and direct *violation* of that Duty. Some, and from a *well-intended*, though perhaps *ill-founded* zele for the honor of Religion, go farther; and ſuppoſe that *every* hour of this Day that is not devoted to *religious* exerciſes of ſome kind or other, is *miſ-ſpent*; and that every kind and degree of *recreation* is a *profanation* of it. This is certainly going too far: And accordingly, others are of opinion that, if the *religious Duties* of the Day are *duly* and *regularly* performed, provided alſo that *no part* of it be employed in the ordinary labors of *wordly* occupation, the great ends of it's inſtitution are anſwered; and that the *reſt* of the Day is open to ſuch *recreations* and *amuſements* as are allowable on the other *ſix*. They accordingly make no ſcruple of indulging themſelves in recreations and amuſements of *every* kind. They aſſert their *Chriſtian liberty* ſo to do: And the *mere lawfulneſs* of the thing conſidered, it may be difficult to ſay on what grounds this liberty of theirs (of thoſe, I mean, who have *diſcharged* the *duties* of the Day) can be juſtly called in queſtion.—But then we ſay that the *lawfulneſs* of a thing is not the *only* circumſtance to be conſidered. We ſay, with the Apoſtle, that, of all the things which are *lawful*, there are yet ſome which are not *expedient*; and that the preſent caſe affords an inſtance of this; in which, however *lawful* the practice *there* contended for may be, it is yet by no means *expedient*; and that this *inexpediency* of

it is the circumſtance that juſtifies us in reproving it.—Now the *inexpediency* of the practice we are ſpeaking of ariſes from the *evil tendency* of it; and the *evil tendency* of it may be pointed out in more inſtances than one.

1. In the firſt place—They who, not having been inſtructed in the principles of Religion have contracted an habit of neglecting it's *Ordinances*, will hereby be *confirmed* in that habit. By *your* practice, which, in *you*, who have *diſcharged* the duties of the Day, may be *allowable*, as far as the *mere lawfulneſs* of it is conſidered, they, not knowing, or not conſidering the circumſtance which *makes* it lawful in *your* caſe, will juſtify *their own*; in whom, for *want* of that circumſtance, it neither is, nor can be, even *lawful*.

2. In the next place, even of thoſe who have been trained up in a ſober ſenſe of Virtue and religious Duty, many may be induced by the example of others (whoſe practice however cannot be drawn into an example of this ſort) to do that of which *they doubt* the lawfulneſs; and the doing of which is in *them* therefore *unlawful*: For "he that *doubteth*" about the lawfulneſs of any thing, "is *condemned* if he doth it;" becauſe, whatever a man doth, which he is not perſuaded in *his own mind* is lawful, is, to *him*, unlawful.—In this caſe therefore, "this *liberty* of *yours* becomes a *ſtumbling-block* to them that "are *weak*," and are *not convinced* of that liberty; who are thereby "emboldened to do the ſame," though in their conſciences

ſciences they *doubt* of it's lawfulneſs; and, conſequentl y, ar doing what in *them* is *ſinful:* — And thus, " through thy " knowlege," whereby thou juſtifieſt the *liberty* thou takeſt, " the *weak* brother," who hath *not* the ſame knowlege and conviction, " periſheth."

Theſe conſiderations make it apparent beyond all diſpute how neceſſary *Diſcretion* is in the exerciſe of our *Chriſtian Liberty* in the particular inſtances to which they are here applied; and how highly *inexpedient* it may be to do, under certain *circumſtances*, what yet we may ſafely grant it to be *lawful* to do.

But this doctrine of *Expediency*, which points out ſo clearly the *diſcretion* neceſſary to be exerciſed on every occaſion where the intereſts of Religion are concerned, is of more extenſive application than would at firſt perhaps be conceived. It is not confined to things *indifferent* in their *nature*, or barely *lawful* in their *uſe*; for, as I would obſerve

IIdly, There are inſtances in which not only what is *barely lawful*, but alſo what in it ſelf is actually *good* and *commendable*, may yet, occaſionally, and by *circumſtances*, become highly *inexpedient* in *practice*.

1. One of these, and which falls under our notice more frequently perhaps than any other, is when, under a pretence of *zele* for the *Truth*, for the *reformation* of *Manners*, or the general purpose of *Instruction*, men (arrogantly presuming on the *righteousness* of their *Cause*, or, on their own superior *abilities* to promote it) unfortunately persue these ends by means that are in no way adapted to the accomplishment of them;—by an absurd *intrusiveness* in the manner of *introducing*—or an untractable *moroseness* in that of *conducting* it. For there is, in fact, but *one* way of recommending *Truths* of any kind with a prospect of success; and that is by *convincing* the *Understanding*; and, in order thereto, engaging the *affections* of mankind on your side: And he that persues these ends by any *other* means—by means that carry neither *argument* nor *persuasion* with them—aims at what he will never be able to accomplish. Whether therefore we would serve the cause of *Truth*, by correcting the *errors* of Mankind, or the cause of *Virtue*, by reforming their *manners* and *conversation*, let us always remember that *Discretion* is as necessary as *Zele*; and that that *inflexible* Spirit which disdains those *prudent* measures by which *alone* they can be advanced, is nothing better than what the Apostle on another occasion, calls a "*Zele* without *Knowlege*," which serves only to make men *obstinate* in their *Opinions*, and *stubborn* in their *Vices*;—and which, in the end, becomes the *grief* of *wise* and *good* Men, whose cause it discredits, and the "*laughter* of *fools*," whom it never can reclaim.

2. The

2. The ſame thing happens alſo when, for want of a proper diſcernment of the *Characters* of thoſe they mix with, Men endeavour to force the great truths of Religion upon them *indiſcriminately*. There are, among the *wickedeſt* of Men,—among thoſe who are abandoned to Vice of every kind, in *practice*—perſons ſtill *open* to *conviction*, and in a *capacity* of being *reclaimed*. There are alſo, among thoſe of a *ſpecious outward character*, Men who *reſiſt*, and even *blaſpheme* the Truth. The *Publicans* and *Harlots* are ſpoken of in Scripture as examples of the *former* ſort; the *chief Prieſts* and *Elders* as inſtances of the *latter*. With the *former* we are authoriſed, by our Saviour's *example*, to communicate, while there is an hope of reclaiming them; From the *latter* we are directed, by his *poſitive precept*, to withdraw our ſelves, as *incorrigible*. "Give "not that which is *holy*, ſays he, to the *Dogs*, neither caſt ye "your *pearls* before *Swine*, leſt they trample *them* under their "feet, and turn again and rend *you*." The wiſe inſtructions and admonitions of the Goſpel are not to be thrown away upon the *obſtinate* and *incorrigible*; who, inſtead of being corrected and amended by them, will only return you ſcoffs, reproaches, and contempt. Saint *Paul*'s conduct was exactly conformable hereto; who, when "the *Jews* ſpake againſt thoſe "things which were ſpoken by him *contradicting* and *blaſ*-"*pheming*, turned from *them*," as unworthy of any farther attempt for their converſion, "to the Gentiles;" Who, though

idolaters

idolaters in *principle*, and probably alſo *diſſolute* in *practice*, were yet of a diſpoſition to attend to what the Apoſtle had to ſay to them; and "were" accordingly "glad, and believed," and embraced his doctrines.

On this head we may obſerve farther, that, beſide thoſe who are literally *enemies* to the Truth, becauſe "they *hate* to "be *reformed*;" there are others, who therefore only *oppoſe* the *Truth*, becauſe they have unhappily been *pre-engaged* on the ſide of *Error*. Now, ſuch perſons, if otherwiſe *tractable*, and *willing* to be inſtructed, as they are not to be treated like the *incorrigible* on the one hand, ſo neither are they to be preſſed in the way of *haſty* and *unſeaſonable* diſputation on the other; which expoſes the Truth to be rejected as well by thoſe who are merely *prepoſſeſſed* againſt it by *accident*, as by thoſe who are *enemies* to it on *principle*.—Where *prejudices* are to be ſubdued, *preconceived Opinions* removed, or *falſe principles* rooted out, a due regard is to be had to *what* people can bear, and *when* they can bear it *beſt*. For the *Underſtanding* is not to be taken by *ſtorm*, but to be won by *gentle* and *gradual approaches*: And, in theſe caſes, *opportunity*, *inſinuation*, and *addreſs* will frequently remove thoſe impediments to conviction, which are not to be ſurmounted and overborn *at once*. This was the *diſcretion* exerciſed by our SAVIOUR; who, on ſuch occaſions, "ſpake the word" unto his hearers "in *parables*," in the way of

of *allusion* and *similitude*, " as they were *able* to hear it :" Well knowing that there are some prejudices which cannot be *plucked* out of the mind *at once*, and yet may be so *loosened* by degrees, that they will *fall off* of themselves; as there are many knots likewise *untied* with *patience* and *leisure*, which, by attempting to *pull asunder*, are only drawn the *closer*.

3. A *Zele* that is governed by *discretion* hath regard, not only to the *manner* in which it exercises, and the *Characters* to which it addresses it self, but to the *times* and *seasons* which are most likely to give success to it's operations. For, in respect of *religious* subjects, as well as others, " there is a time to " *keep silence*, as well as a time to *speak :*" And he that, through inattention to these, mistakes the one for the other, will not only fall short of the end he hath in view, but probably also cause " his *good*"—i. e. his own good *design*, if not also the good he would *recommend*, to " be evil spoken of." In other words—When the great and important truths of Religion are unadvisedly brought forward as topics of *general* conversation, the conductor of it will, on many occasions, expose *himself* to ridicule, and probably also draw contempt upon his *cause*. The objects of these are " things *not seen*," and in which therefore, though of " *eternal*" moment, the generality of mankind do not perceive themselves *interested* so much as in " the things that *are seen*," though but of " *temporal*" concern.

And,

And, in proportion as this is the caſe, they are both *ignorant* of the *nature*, and *indifferent* (perhaps *averſe*) to the *contemplation* of them. Subjects of *this* kind therefore are better reſerved for *private* and *ſelect* diſcuſſion, with thoſe who have *ſenſe* enough to diſcern the importance of, and have been, in ſome degree, *habituated* to reflect upon, them.

Having now gone through the Apoſtle's general doctrine of *Expediency*, as it aroſe out of the Queſtion propoſed to him by different Converts of the Church of CORINTH; and given ſome of the principal inſtances in which it applies with ſingular force to other caſes in which the intereſts of *Truth* and *Religion* are concerned, I might procede

IIIdly, To ſhew the importance of it likewiſe in the *common intercourſes* of Life; in which *decency* and *propriety* are manifeſtly broken in upon on every occaſion in which Men depart from the great rule of *Expediency*, by acting unſuitably to the *character* they are inveſted with, and the *ſituation* they are placed in. For every *ſituation* in life derives, upon him that is placed in it, a correſpondent *character*; a character peculiar to *it ſelf*; and which, in contradiſtinction to that *private* and *perſonal* character which is the reſult of thoſe qualities that diſtinguiſh him from other *men*, may be called his *public*, *ſocial*, or *profeſſional* character. Each of theſe again hath it's appendent *Duties*; a regular and due diſcharge of which conſti-

tutes

tutes *propriety* of conduct. Now an attention to this is conſidered, by a great Maſter in Ethics, as inſeparably connected even with *moral rectitude* * ; and, conſequently, every deviation from it as *eſſentially wrong*. Our *heathen* Moraliſt and the *inſpired* one differ indeed only in this, that what the former calls *indecorous*, or, in a more popular way of ſpeaking, an *impropriety*, the latter calls *inexpedient*; for in this they both agree, that what, in the language of one is an *impropriety*, and, in that of the other, *inexpedient*, is a degradation of the *Character*, and a tranſgreſſion of *moral Duty*.—But, as theſe are offences againſt *ſociety* and *good manners*, rather than againſt *Religion* and *Virtue*; and therefore of leſs importance either to our characters and obligations as *Chriſtians*, or to the general intereſts of the *Chriſtian Profeſſion* it ſelf, I ſhall leave the application of the *general* doctrine, in theſe caſes, to the *private* conſideration of thoſe who may find themſelves concerned to make it.

Permit me however, before I diſmiſs this ſubject, to add a few words by way of *recommending* and *enforcing* the doctrine I have hitherto been endeavouring to *explain*.

In the proſecution then of any *end*, and in proportion to the value and importance of it, we are always to take care that the

* Hujus (ſc. *decori*) vis ea eſt, ut ab *honeſto* non queat ſeparari.
Cic. de Off. I. 27.

means

means, we employ for the accompliſhment of it, be not only *adapted* to it in their own *general tendency*; but that the ſucceſs of them be not endangered by any inadvertence on our part in the *conduct* and *application* of them. An *Artiſt* may be poſſeſſed of the proper *inſtruments* for executing a work before him; yet, if *negligent* or *unſkilled* in the *uſe* of them, be incapable of bringing it to perfection. *Example* and *Inſtruction* are the obvious methods of ſpreading the influence of *Religion:* Yet, if our *Example*, however *good*, have any thing in it that is liable to be *miſconſtrued*; or our Inſtructions, however *ſound*, be *injudiciouſly*, *indiſcriminately*, or *unſeaſonably* adminiſtered, we may leave ſuch impreſſions upon the minds of thoſe we would reform, as may defeat our intention of bringing them over to it's intereſts.—We muſt not therefore think ourſelves juſtified in the practice of what is *merely lawful*, or content ourſelves with doing even what is *good* and *commendable*, without looking forward to the *conſequences* that may ariſe out of our *manner* of doing it. We muſt conſider and accomodate our ſelves to the different *tempers* and *diſpoſitions*, the ſeveral *prejudices* and *infirmities* of mankind. In this manner we ſhall gain upon their *affections*; and, until that is done, we cannot hope to work upon their *underſtandings:* For, unleſs they are firſt brought to have a good opinion of *our ſelves*, they are not likely to be wrought upon either by our *doctrine* or *example*.—They who

who think this too great a ſubmiſſion, do not ſufficiently diſtinguiſh between a *ſervile* compliance with the *practices* of the World, which our *Religion* forbids, and that *innocent* condeſcenſion to it's *weakneſſes*, which Chriſtian *prudence* not only allows, but recommends. And indeed, if it is becoming our Chriſtian character to *convert* men to the Truth, it cannot be unbecoming us, by engaging their *affections* on it's ſide, to recommend it to their *choice*.—Hear what *St. Paul* ſays to this purpoſe; with whoſe *reaſoning* upon, and *example* in the very caſe under conſideration, I ſhall conclude this Diſcourſe.—" To the JEWS," ſays he,—" to them that are *under* the Law" of MOSES, " I became " as a JEW"—" as under the Law" *my ſelf*; conforming to their ceremonies, as far as was conſiſtent with the Goſpel of CHRIST, " that I might gain them" whom I found in *that* ſituation. Thus, " I *circumciſed* Timothy for their " ſakes;" and *purified* my ſelf in the Temple in conformity with their prejudices.—On the other hand; " To " them that are *without* Law," i. e. the GENTILES, " I " became as *without* Law"—argued with them on thoſe principles of *Reaſon* which they have always acknowleged, " that I might gain them" whom I found *ſo* circumſtanced. And, in general, " To the *weak*" of every denomination—to thoſe that had ſcruples of any ſort, about *days*, or *meats*, or *ceremonial* obſervances of any kind—" *I* became as *weak*"

 —I humoured

—I humoured their *prejudices*, and even adopted their *ſcruples*; refraining from the exerciſe of "that *liberty* with "which CHRIST hath made me *free*," and which I therefore might have exerciſed if I had been ſo diſpoſed, "that I might gain the *weak*." In a word, "I am made "all *things* to all *men*," as far as an *innocent* compliance goes, which, in theſe caſes, muſt always be a *prudent* and *warrantable* one, "that I might, by all means"—by all theſe means of *forbearance* and *compliance*, "ſave" as many as I could. "And this I do," ſays he, "for the *Goſpel's* "ſake"—as the *likelieſt* method of bringing men over to the belief and acknowlegment of thoſe Truths "of which I am ordained a Preacher and an Apoſtle." And, ſo convinced am I of the *propriety* and *efficacy* of theſe meaſures; and ſo fixed in my reſolution of perſuing them; that, although, "the hand-writing of *Ordinancies* being blotted "out," no man hath *now* a right to "judge me in *meat*, or "in *drink*, or in reſpect of an *holy day*, or of the *new moon*, "or of the *Sabbath*"—yet, if *meat* make my Brother to "*offend*, I will" wave my liberty, and "eat *no* fleſh while "the world ſtandeth."

Such was the Apoſtle's *reaſoning* and *practice* in order to conciliate the *affections* of Mankind, and thereby gain a more eaſy admiſſion for the doctrines of the Goſpel. Had he

he fallen *directly* upon their infirmities and miſtakes, he would have *diſguſted* their minds, and rendered them *deaf* to his inſtructions. He knew that *patience* and *gentleneſs* would gradually get the better of their prejudices, and lead them, without oppoſition, to the acknowlegment of the Truth:—that, by *prudent* treatment, thoſe prejudices might be overcome; and, as the light of the Goſpel began to dawn upon their minds, their affections would take a *new* turn of *themſelves*, which, in their *natural* ſtate, were not to be ſtemmed.—In a word, he conducted himſelf like a ſkilful *Pilot*, who coaſts it along the *ſhore*, when the Tide runs too ſtrong in the *channel*; as knowing it to be not only the *ſafeſt*, but the *ſhorteſt* way to the point he would make.*

* See Sherlock's Serm. Vol. iv. p. 196.

THE END.